



NO. 9
JUNE-JULY

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SHOCK

SUSPENSTORIES

**JOLTING TALES OF
TENSION**

IN THE



TRADITION!



FELOSIN

IN THIS ISSUE:
E.C.'S ADAPTATION OF A STORY BY
RAY BRADBURY
AMERICA'S TOP HORROR WRITER!

RAY BRADBURY



Ray Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Ill., on Aug. 22, 1920. His mother was of Swedish descent, and his father's ancestors came to America in 1630. Ray spent much of his childhood in Arizona. At the age of 12, he received his first typewriter, a toy model, and started to write sequels to Edgar Rice Burroughs novels. As a boy, his greatest interests were magic, acting, and reading the Oz books, Tom Swift, Edgar Allen Poe, and Jules Verne. So it was quite natural, when he began writing, that his first stories were fantasies. He took a short-story course in Los Angeles High School in 1937, graduated in 1938, and had no further formal education. He started submitting stories to magazines at the age of 15, and sold his first story at the age of 21. His early acceptances appeared in the leading pulp magazines. Then in 1945, he sold his first "quality" story to the American Mercury, and followed this with sales to most of America's best-known slick magazines. His stories have been reprinted in some 60 anthologies, including the 1946, 1948, and 1952 volumes of *The Best American Short Stories*. In 1948, Ray won third prize in the O. Henry Memorial Prize Stories Awards. The only other job Bradbury has ever held outside of writing was during the three years from 1939 to 1942, when he sold newspapers on a street corner at night, while writing during the day. He has had three books of stories published: *DARK CARNIVAL*, from Arkham House in 1947; *THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES*, from Doubleday in 1950; and *THE ILLUSTRATED MAN*, Doubleday, 1951. His new book of stories, *THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN*, is due, again from Doubleday, about the time this bio hits the stands. Ray has just finished writing a science-fiction movie script for a big Hollywood film studio, and has started another. He now lives in Los Angeles with his wife Marguerite, whom he married in 1947, and his two daughters . . . Susan, age three, and Ramona, eighteen months. Having been a fervent collector of comic strips and panels since the age of eight (owning a complete file of Buck Rogers strips from 1928 through 1937, Flash Gordon from 1934 through 1938, Prince Valiant from 1937 through the present, and Tarzan (drawn by Hal Foster) from 1932 through 1936, plus hundreds of old Popeyes, Out Our Ways, Alley Oops, etc.), Ray was most enthusiastic when we suggested adapting some of best stories into the comic format. His reaction to the job E.C. is doing can best be summed up in his own words: ". . . My thanks and gratitude for the really fine adaptations and beautiful art work you are doing on my stories. This is an entirely new experience to me, and I cannot tell you enough how much I appreciate the painstaking detail and thought you are putting into your efforts. It seems to me that again and again you achieve the exactly right atmosphere and angle in carrying out the story. . . . You people have a way of continually making me happy. I can't thank you enough!"

The OCTOBER GAME

MITCH PUT THE GUN BACK INTO THE BUREAU DRAWER...

NO, NOT THAT WAY. LOUISE WOULDN'T SUFFER THAT WAY. SHE WOULD BE DEAD AND IT WOULD BE OVER AND SHE WOULDN'T SUFFER. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT THIS THING HAVE, ABOVE ALL, DURATION. DURATION THROUGH IMAGINATION. HOW CAN I PROLONG HER SUFFERING? HOW, FIRST OF ALL, CAN I BRING IT ABOUT? WELL...



A HORROR SUSPENSE STORY
ADAPTED FROM A TALE BY
RAY BRADBURY

THE MAN STANDING BEFORE THE BEDROOM MIRROR CAREFULLY FITTED HIS CUFF LINKS TOGETHER. HE PAUSED LONG ENOUGH TO HEAR THE CHILDREN RUN BY SWIFTLY ON THE STREET BELOW, OUTSIDE THIS WARM TWO-STORY HOUSE; LIKE SO MANY GRAY MICE, THE CHILDREN... LIKE SO MANY LEAVES...



BY THE SOUND OF THE CHILDREN, YOU KNEW THE CALENDAR DAY. BY THEIR SCREAMS, YOU KNEW WHAT EVENING IT WAS. YOU KNEW IT WAS VERY LATE IN THE YEAR. OCTOBER. THE LAST DAY OF OCTOBER, WITH WHITE BONE MASKS AND CUT PUMPKINS AND THE SMELL OF DROPPED CANDLE FAT...



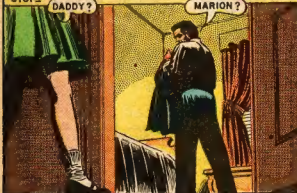
A Marble River scene

NO. THINGS HADN'T BEEN RIGHT FOR SOME TIME. OCTOBER DIDN'T HELP ANY. IF ANYTHING, IT MADE THINGS WORSE. HE NODDED SLOWLY AT HIS IMAGE IN THE MIRROR... ADJUSTING HIS BLACK BOW-TIE...

IF... IF THIS WERE *SPRING*, THEN THERE MIGHT BE A *CHANCE*. BUT *TONIGHT*, ALL THE WORLD IS BURNING DOWN INTO *RUIN*. THERE'S NO *GREEN* OF SPRING, NONE OF THE *FRESHNESS*, NONE OF THE *PROMISE*...



BUT IT WAS *DIFFERENT* TONIGHT. THERE WAS A FEELING OF AUTUMN COMING TO LAST A *MILLION YEARS*. THERE WOULD BE NO *SPRING*. HE HAD BEEN CRYING QUIETLY ALL EVENING. IT DIDN'T SHOW ON HIS FACE. IT WAS ALL SOMEWHERE HIDDEN. BUT IT WOULDN'T STOP...



AS HE FINISHED HIS BOW-TIE AND PUT ON HIS DARK COAT, MARION APPEARED IN THE DOOR, ALL SKELETONOUS IN HER DISGUISE...



MITCH HAD NEVER LIKED OCTOBER... EVER SINCE HE FIRST LAY IN THE AUTUMN LEAVES BEFORE HIS GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE MANY YEARS AGO AND HEARD THE WIND AND SAW THE EMPTY TREES. IT HAD MADE HIM CRY... WITHOUT A REASON...

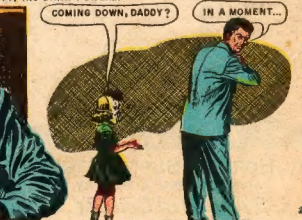


AND A LITTLE OF THAT SADNESS RETURNED EACH YEAR TO HIM. IT ALWAYS WENT AWAY WITH THE SPRING.

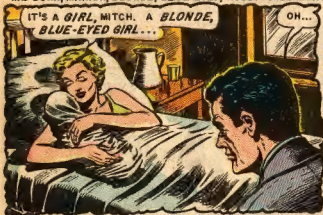
THERE WAS A SOFT RUNNING IN THE HALL. IT WAS MARION, HIS LITTLE ONE. ALL EIGHT QUIET YEARS OF HER. NEVER A WORD. JUST HER LUMINOUS GRAY EYES AND HER WONDERING LITTLE MOUTH. MARION HAD BEEN IN AND OUT ALL EVENING, TRYING ON VARIOUS MASKS, ASKING HIM WHICH WAS MOST TERRIFYING, MOST HORRIBLE. THEY'D BOTH FINALLY DECIDED...



FROM UNDER THE MASK, BLONDE HAIR SHOWED. FROM THE SKULL SOCKETS, SMALL BLUE EYES SMILED. MITCH SIGHED. MARION... AND LOUISE... THE TWO SILENT DENOUNCERS OF HIS VIRILITY, HIS DARK POWER...



WHAT **ALCHEMY** HAD THERE BEEN IN LOUISE THAT TOOK THE DARK OF A DARK MAN AND BLEACHED AND BLEACHED THE DARK BROWN EYES AND BLACK HAIR AND WASHED AND BLEACHED THE INGROWN BABY ALL DURING THE PERIOD BEFORE BIRTH UNTIL THE CHILD WAS BORN, MARION, BLONDE, BLUE EYES, RUDDY-CHEEKED...



LOUISE HAD NEVER WANTED A CHILD. SHE'D BEEN FRIGHTENED OF THE IDEA OF BIRTH. HE'D FORGED THE CHILD ON HER. IT HAD BEEN VERY EASY FOR LOUISE TO HATE THIS HUSBAND WHO SO WANTED A SON THAT HE'D GIVE HIS ONLY WIFE OVER TO A MORTUARY. WHEN MITCH HAD PUT OUT A HAND TO TOUCH, THE MOTHER HAD TURNED AWAY TO CONSPIRE WITH HER NEW PINK DAUGHTER-CHILD, AWAY FROM THE DARK FORCING MURDERER.



NOW IT WAS OCTOBER AGAIN. THERE HAD BEEN OTHER OCTOBERS. HE'D THOUGHT OF THE LONG WINTERS, YEAR AFTER YEAR, THE ENDLESS MONTHS MORTARED INTO THE HOUSE BY AN INSANE FALL OF SNOW, TRAPPED WITH A WOMAN AND CHILD, NEITHER OF WHOM LOVED HIM...



SOMETIMES HE SUSPECTED THAT LOUISE HAD CONCEIVED THE CHILD AS AN IDEA, COMPLETELY ASEXUAL, A CONCEPTION OF CONTEMPTUOUS MIND AND CELL. AS A FIRM **REBUKE** TO HIM, SHE HAD PRODUCED A CHILD IN HER OWN IMAGE. HER EYES, THAT DAY IN THE HOSPITAL, WERE COLD. THEY'D SAID...



AND IT HAD ALL BEEN SO BEAUTIFULLY IRONIC. HIS SELFISHNESS DESERVED IT. THE DOCTOR HAD SHAKEN HIS HEAD AND SAID...



DURING THE EIGHT YEARS, THERE HAD BEEN RESPITES. IN SPRING AND SUMMER HE GOT OUT, WALKED, WENT TO BALL GAMES; THERE WERE DESPERATE SOLUTIONS TO THE DESPERATE PROBLEM OF A HATED MAN...



BUT IN WINTER, THE HIKES AND GAMES AND ESCAPES FELL AWAY WITH THE LEAVES. LIFE, LIKE A TREE, STOOD EMPTY, THE FRUIT PICKED, THE SAP RUN TO EARTH. AND NOW, THE EIGHTH WINTER COMING, HE KNEW THINGS WERE FINALLY AT AN END. HE SIMPLY COULD NOT WEAR THIS ONE THROUGH...



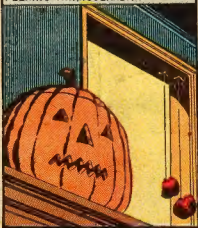
THERE WAS AN ACID WALLED OFF IN HIM THAT HAD SLOWLY EATEN THROUGH TISSUE AND TISSUE OVER THE YEARS... AND NOW, TONIGHT, IT WOULD REACH THE WILD EXPLOSIVE IN HIM AND ALL WOULD BE OVER. DOWNSTAIRS, THERE WERE SHOUTS AND HILARITY... MARION, GREETING THE FIRST ARRIVALS... LOUISE, TAKING PARENTS' COATS...



A RICH SYRUPY SMELL OF CANDY FILLED THE BUSTLING HOUSE. LOUISE HAD LAID OUT APPLES IN NEW SKINS OF CARAMEL. THERE WERE VAST BOWLS OF PUNCH FRESH-MIXED...



... STRINGED APPLES IN EACH DOORWAY... SCOOPED, VENTED PUMPKINS PEERING TRIANGULARLY...



...AND A WAITING TUB OF WATER IN THE CENTER OF THE LIVING ROOM, WAITING WITH A SACK OF APPLES NEARBY FOR THE BOBBLING TO BEGIN...



MITCH WALKED TOWARD THE STAIRS. HE HESITATED...

WHY DON'T I JUST PACK A SUITCASE AND LEAVE? NO, NOT WITHOUT HURTING LOUISE AS MUCH AS SHE'S HURT ME. DIVORCE WOULDN'T HURT HER AT ALL. NO, I MUST HURT HER. FIGURE SOME WAY TO TAKE MARION AWAY FROM HER, LEGALLY. YES, THAT'S IT. THAT WOULD HURT MOST OF ALL... TO TAKE MARION AWAY...

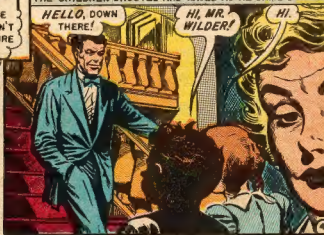


HE DESCENDED THE STAIRS. LOUISE DIDN'T LOOK UP. THE CHILDREN SHOUTED AND WAVED AS HE CAME DOWN...

HELLO, DOWN THERE!

HI, MR. WILDER!

HI.



BY TEN O'CLOCK THE DOORBELL HAD STOPPED RINGING, THE APPLES WERE BITTEN FROM STRINGED DOORS, THE PINK CHILD FACES WERE WIPED DRY FROM APPLE BOBBING, NAPKINS WERE SMEARED WITH CARAMEL AND PUNCH, AND HE, THE HUSBAND, HAD TAKEN OVER. HE TOOK THE PARTY RIGHT OUT OF LOUISE'S HANDS. HE RAN ABOUT, TALKING TO THE TWENTY CHILDREN AND THE TWELVE PARENTS, WHO WERE HAPPY WITH THE SPECIAL SPIKED CIDER HE'D FIXED THEM...

HE SUPERVISED PIN THE TAIL ON THE DONKEY...



...SPIN THE BOTTLE...



...MUSICAL CHAIRS...



...AND ALL THE REST, MIDST FITS OF SHOUTING LAUGHTER. THEN, IN THE TRIANGULAR-EYED PUMPKIN SHINE, ALL HOUSE LIGHTS OUT, HE CRIED.



HE TIPTOED TOWARD THE CELLAR. THE PARENTS COMMENTED TO EACH OTHER, NODDING AT THE CLEVER HUSBAND, SPEAKING TO THE LUCKY WIFE...

HOW WELL HE GETS ON WITH THE CHILDREN.

YES.

THE CELLAR! THE TOMB OF THE WITCH!



THE CHILDREN CROWDED AFTER THE HUSBAND, SQUEALING. HE MADE A MOCK SHIVER...

ABANDON HOPE... ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE.



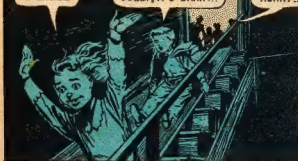
THE PARENTS CHUCKLED...

ONE BY ONE, THE CHILDREN SLID DOWN A SLIDE, WHICH MITCH HAD FIXED UP FROM TABLE SECTIONS, INTO THE DARK CELLAR. HE HISSED AND SHOUTED GHASTLY UTTERANCES AFTER THEM. A WONDERFUL WAILING FILLED THE DARK PUMPKIN-LIGHTED HOUSE. EVERYBODY TALKED AT ONCE. EVERYBODY BUT MARION. SHE'D GONE THROUGH THE PARTY WITH A MINIMUM OF SOUND. IT WAS ALL INSIDE HER, ALL OF THE EXCITEMENT AND JOY...

WEEEEE...

GOLLY, IT'S DARK...

HURRY...



NOW, THE PARENTS. WITH LAUGHING RELUCTANCE THEY SLID DOWN THE INCLINE, UPROARIOUS, WHILE MARION STOOD BY, ALWAYS WANTING TO SEE IT ALL, TO BE THE LAST. LOUISE WENT DOWN WITHOUT MITCH'S HELP. MARION STOOD BY THE SLIDE. MITCH PICKED HER UP...

HERE WE GO.



THEY SAT IN A VAST CIRCLE IN THE CELLAR. WARMTH CAME FROM THE DISTANT BULK OF THE FURNACE. THE CHAIRS STOOD IN A LONG LINE DOWN EACH WALL, TWENTY SQUEALING CHILDREN, TWELVE RUSTLING RELATIVES, ALTERNATELY SPACED. THEY HAD ALL GROPED TO THEIR CHAIRS IN THE BLACKNESS, THE ENTIRE PROGRAM FROM HERE ON WAS TO BE ENACTED IN THE DARK, HE AS MR. INTERLOCUTOR...



THERE WAS A SMELL OF DAMP CEMENT AND THE SOUND OF THE WIND OUT IN THE OCTOBER STARS. EVERYBODY SETTLED. THE ROOM WAS BLACK BLACK. NOT A LIGHT, NOT A SHINE, NOT A GLINT OF AN EYE. THERE WAS A SCRAPING OF CROCKERY, A METAL RATTLE. THE HUSBAND INTONED...



THE WITCH IS DEAD, SHE HAS BEEN KILLED, AND HERE IS THE KNIFE SHE WAS KILLED WITH.



HE HANDED OVER THE KNIFE. IT WAS PASSED FROM HAND TO HAND, DOWN AND AROUND THE CIRCLE, WITH CHUCKLES AND LITTLE ODD CRIES AND COMMENTS FROM THE ADULTS...

THE WITCH IS DEAD, AND THIS IS HER HEAD.



...WHISPERED THE HUSBAND, AND HANDED AN ITEM TO THE NEAREST PERSON.

SOME LITTLE CHILD CRIED HAPPILY IN THE DARK...

OH, I KNOW HOW *THIS* GAME IS PLAYED. HE GETS SOME OLD *CHICKEN* INNARDS AND HE HANDS THEM AROUND SAYING 'THESE ARE HER INNARDS!', AND HE MAKES A *OLAY* HEAD AND PASSES IT FOR HER HEAD, AND PASSES A *SOUP BONE* FOR HER ARM, AND HE TAKES A *MARBLE* AND SAYS, 'THIS IS HER EYE!' AND SOME *CORN* FOR HER TEETH AND A SACK OF *PLUMB PUDDING* AND GIVES THAT AND SAYS, 'THIS IS HER STOMACH.' I KNOW HOW *THIS* IS PLAYED!



MITCH SAID...

THE WITCH CAME TO HARM, AND THIS IS HER ARM.



TEE-HEE...

THE ITEMS WERE PASSED AND PASSED, LIKE HOT POTATOES, AROUND THE CIRCLE. SOME CHILDREN SCREAMED, WOULDN'T TOUCH THEM. SOME RAN FROM THEIR CHAIRS TO STAND IN THE CENTER OF THE CELLAR UNTIL THE GRISLY ITEMS HAD PASSED. ONE BOY SCOFFED...



SHOT FROM HAND TO HAND WITH SMALL SCREAM AFTER SCREAM, THE ITEMS WENT DOWN THE LINE, DOWN, DOWN, TO BE FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER AND ANOTHER. THE HUSBAND SAID...

THE WITCH IS CUT APART,
AND THIS IS HER HEART.



SIX OR SEVEN ITEMS MOVING AT ONCE THROUGH THE LAUGHING, TREMBLING DARK, LOUISE SPOKE UP...

MARION DON'T BE AFRAID: IT'S
ONLY PLAY.



MARION DIDN'T SPEAK. LOUISE
ASKED...

MARION?
ARE YOU AFRAID?

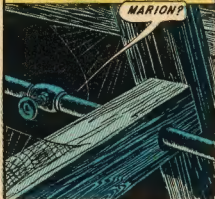
SHE'S ALL
RIGHT. SHE'S
NOT AFRAID.



...SAID THE HUSBAND. MARION
DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING...

ON AND ON THE PASSING, THE SCREAMS,
THE HILARITY. THE AUTUMN WIND
SIGHED ABOUT THE HOUSE. AND HE,
THE HUSBAND, STOOD IN THE DARK
CELLAR, INTONING THE WORDS, HANDING
OUT THE ITEMS. LOUISE'S VOICE CAME
AGAIN FROM FAR ACROSS THE CELLAR...

MARION?



EVERYBODY WAS TALKING...

MARION, ANSWER ME, ARE
YOU AFRAID?



EVERYBODY QUIETED...

MARION DIDN'T ANSWER. THE HUSBAND STOOD
THERE, AT THE HEAD OF THE DARK CELLAR...
LOUISE CALLED ...

MARION, ARE YOU THERE?



NO ANSWER, THE ROOM WAS SILENT...

WHERE'S MARION?

MAYBE SHE'S
UPSTAIRS?

MARION!



NO ANSWER... IT WAS QUIET...

LOUISE CRIED OUT...

TURN ON THE LIGHTS!

MARION...
MARION...

THE ITEMS STOPPED PASSING. THE CHILDREN AND ADULTS SAT WITH THE WITCHES' ITEMS IN THEIR HANDS.

THERE WAS A SCRAPING OF A CHAIR, WILDLY, IN THE DARK. LOUISE GASPED...

NO. NO, DON'T TURN ON THE LIGHTS, DON'T TURN ON THE LIGHTS, OH GOD, GOD, GOD. DON'T TURN THEM ON, PLEASE, PLEASE DON'T TURN ON THE LIGHTS.

DON'T!

LOUISE WAS SHRIEKING NOW. THE ENTIRE CELLAR FROZE WITH THE SCREAM. NOBODY MOVED...

EVERYONE SAT SUSPENDED IN THE SUDDEN FROZEN TASK OF THIS OCTOBER GAME; THE WIND BLEW OUTSIDE BANGING THE HOUSE. THE SMELL OF PUMPKINS AND APPLES FILLED THE ROOM WITH THE SMELL OF THE OBJECTS IN THEIR FINGERS WHILE ONE BOY CRIED...

I'LL GO UPSTAIRS AND LOOK!

...AND HE RAN UPSTAIRS HOPEFULLY AND OUT AROUND THE HOUSE FOUR TIMES, AROUND THE HOUSE, CALLING...

MARION, MARION, MARION!

...AND AT LAST COMING SLOWLY DOWN THE STAIRS INTO THE WAITING, BREATHING CELLAR AND SAYING TO THE DARKNESS...

I CAN'T FIND HER...

THEN... SOME IDIOT TURNED ON THE LIGHTS...



THE END

CAME the DAWN!

I KNEW SOMEBODY WAS IN THE LODGE THE MINUTE I HIT THE CLEARING I'D BEEN AWAY ALL DAY HUNTING DOWN AN ELUSIVE DEER AND HAD STARTED BACK EMPTY HANDED I SAW THE FAINT WISP OF SMOKE CURLING UPWARD FROM THE FIELDSTONE CHIMNEY AND DRIFTING OFF INTO THE GATHERING TWILIGHT I REMEMBERED HAVING PUT OUT THE FIRE THAT MORNING. INSTINCTIVELY, I PULLED THE BOLT ON MY SAVAGE 30-30 AND SLID IT HOME THEN I KICKED THE DOOR OPEN



ALL RIGHT GET YOUR HANDS **WHAT THE**

GASP

I NEARLY DROPPED MY RIFLE SHE'D BEEN STANDING BEFORE THE FIREPLACE AND HAD SPUN AROUND AS I BARGED IN. SHE SHRANK BACKWARD AT THE SIGHT OF THE GUN POINTING AT HER

I JUST STOOD THERE STARING AT HER. SHE WAS A VISION OF LOVELINESS. THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CREATURE I'D EVER SEEN. HER BLONDE HAIR, CATCHING THE FIRELIGHT, FELL LIKE A GOLDEN WATERFALL ABOUT HER BARE SHOULDERS. SHE CLUTCHED THE BORROWED BED SHEET TIGHTLY ABOUT HER SO THAT IT ACCENTED THE SOFT FLOWING CURVES OF HER SHAPELY BODY



A A GIRL?

OH! YOU YOU FRIGHTENED ME! IS THIS YOUR CABIN?

A Mistle Silver Screen



I SAID... IS THIS YOUR CABIN?

HUNPON... YES! IT IS!

wood.

BEHIND HER, A MAKESHIFT CLOTHESLINE STRUNG BEFORE THE FIREPLACE HELD PINK LACY UNDERTHINGS, A PAIR OF SHEER STOCKINGS, A LIGHT BLUE BLOUSE, AND A DARK BLUE SKIRT. BELOW, A POOL OF WATER RIPPLED...

I...I WAS LOST. I FELL IN THE STREAM OUT THERE. YOUR DOOR WAS OPEN. SO...

LOST? WHAT'S A GIRL LIKE YOU DOING UP HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE?



SHE DROPPED HER EYES AND SMILED, HER SOFT LIPS PARTING, REVEALING WHITE EVEN TEETH...

I GUESS THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED. I WANDERED AROUND ALL DAY. THEN I SAW YOUR CABIN. I THOUGHT IT WAS MINE.

AND YOU DIDN'T SEE THE STREAM...



I MOVED TOWARD HER. SHE STOPPED AS IF SHE'D SUDDENLY BEEN FROZEN. I REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED HER CLOTHES...

THEY'RE STILL WET. YOU'LL CATCH A DEATH OF COLD IF YOU PUT THEM BACK ON. I'LL LEND YOU SOMETHING TO WEAR

SHE SHOOK HER HEAD...

UH-UH! I GOT SOAKED TO MY SKIN. I BUILT THE FIRE AND... OH, I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND! I BORROWED THIS SHEET OFF THE BED IN THERE...

LUCKY THING WITH ME BUSTING IN HERE LIKE THAT!



SHE STARTED SNATCHING HER CLOTHES OFF THE MAKESHIFT LINE...

I'LL GET INTO MY THINGS. THEY MUST BE DRY...

HOLD IT A MINUTE...



I WENT INTO THE BEDROOM AND GOT A T-SHIRT AND A PAIR OF JEANS...

HERE. THESE OUGHT TO DO TILL TOMORROW

TOMORROW!?



I NODDED, POINTING OUT THE WINDOW...

IT'S GETTING DARK OUT. WE'D BE CRAZY TO TRY TO FIND YOUR FATHER'S CABIN TONIGHT! YOU'LL HAVE TO STAY HERE TILL MORNING!

OH...

SHE TOOK THE CLOTHES AND WENT INTO THE BEDROOM AND SHUT THE DOOR. I SMILED, THINKING ABOUT ALL THE BOOKS I'D READ WITH SITUATIONS LIKE THIS. I'D NEVER BELIEVED IT COULD HAPPEN EXCEPT IN BOOKS. ALONE, WITH A BEAUTIFUL GIRL, IN A CABIN DEEP IN THE WOODS...

YOU MUST BE HUNGRY!

STARVED.

I WENT INTO THE KITCHEN AND LIT THE KEROSENE STOVE. THEN I STARTED OPENING SOME CANS. SHE CAME IN AFTER A WHILE...

HERE LET ME DO THAT!

SAY

SHE GLIDED ACROSS THE KITCHEN FLOOR, BAREFOOT EXCEPT FOR WHERE THE WAIST WRINKLED UP UNDER THE BELT. MY JEANS FIT HER NICELY. AND THE T-SHIRT... WELL... IT LOOKED AS THOUGH IT HAD BEEN PAINTED ONTO HER CURVACIOUS BODY...

AS LONG AS WE'RE GOING TO SPEND THE NIGHT TOGETHER, WE MIGHT AS WELL INTRODUCE OURSELVES. I'M GATHY MAXWELL...

BOB AMES. MAXWELL, EH? CAN'T SAY AS I'VE HEARD THAT NAME MENTIONED DOWN IN THE VILLAGE

I SAW HER KNUCKLES WHITEN AS SHE GRIPPED THE KNIFE SHE WAS USING TO CUT THE BREAD...

DADDY JUST BOUGHT THE CABIN LAST MONTH. IT USED TO BELONG TO... OH, DEAR. I CAN'T REMEMBER THEIR NAME.

THAT'S OKAY WE'LL FIND IT.

WE ATE IN SILENCE. CATHY SEEMED NERVOUS. SHE STARTED AT EACH LITTLE SOUND OUTSIDE. I STUDIED HER. SHE WAS TWENTY...MAYBE TWENTY-ONE...WITH THE KIND OF FACE YOU'D SEE ON MAGAZINE COVERS. SHE SAW ME STARING AT HER AND SMILED...

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF, BOB. MARRIED? GOT A GIRL?

NO TO BOTH QUESTIONS, YOU?

HER FACE DARKENED

NOT ANY MORE. I WAS ENGAGED BUT...WELL, THAT'S ALL OVER WITH NOW. I...I CAME UP HERE TO FORGET

OH YOU BREAK IT OFF. OR HIM?

SHE GOT UP FROM THE TABLE AND MOVED INTO THE LIVING ROOM. SHE LOOKED AROUND...



SHE LOOKED INTO MY EYES INVITINGLY



SHE PUT HER FINGERS TO MY LIPS. SHE SHOOK HER HEAD WHISPERING SOFTLY, HER CHEST RISING AND FALLING WITH EACH BREATH SHE DREW...



SHE CURLED UP ON THE COUCH BEFORE THE FIRE AND I BENT OVER AND LIT HER CIGARETTE. SHE DREW IN THE SMOKE, PURSED HER LIPS AND BLEW IT OUT INTO MY FACE IMPHISLY...



I STARTED TO BACK OFF...TO SIT DOWN IN THE CHAIR NEARBY...BUT SHE PATTED THE COUCH CUSHION BESIDE HER...



SHE WAS MAKING THINGS DIFFICULT FOR ME. I SLID DOWN BESIDE HER AND SHE PUT HER HEAD ON MY SHOULDER. SHE STARED INTO THE FIRE AND BEYOND IT, SMILING...



I PULLED HER TO ME AND SHE CAME ANXIOUSLY, ALMOST SAVAGELY. HER LIPS WERE WARM AND EAGER, AND SHE PRESSED AGAINST ME AS WE CLUNG TO EACH OTHER...



THAT NIGHT CATHY WAS A FURNACE OF CONSUMING PASSION AND I WAS HER STOKER. TOWARD DAWN THE FIRE HAD DIED TO A PILE OF BURNING EMBERS. THE CABIN HAD CHILLED AND CATHY SHIVERED AS I HELD HER IN MY ARMS...



I'LL PUT ANOTHER LOG ON...

NO, DON'T! HOLD ME.

THEN I STIRRED UP THE FIRE AND PUT A FEW LOGS ON AND SAT DOWN ON THE CHAIR AND LIT MY PIPE. I WATCHED THE FLAMES LEAPING HUNGRILY, LICKING AT THE DRY FUEL. I LOOKED AT CATHY... BEAUTIFUL, DESIRABLE CATHY...

I WAS WIDE AWAKE. MY MIND WAS RACING AT TOP SPEED, FILLED WITH A MILLION CHURNING THOUGHTS. CATHY... CATHY...



ALL MY LIFE I'VE LOOKED FOR HER. ALL MY LIFE. AND NOW, SHE'S HERE... BESIDE ME... AND SHE'S MINE.

SHE WAS ASLEEP. I WENT INTO THE BEDROOM AND GOT A BLANKET AND COVERED HER...

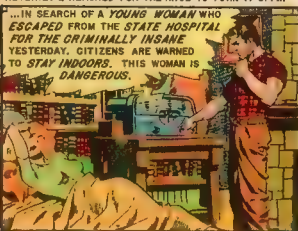


I FLIPPED ON THE RADIO AND TURNED IT TO THE LOCAL STATION, AND THE MUSIC CAME UP SOFTLY.. FILLING THE ROOM...



AND NOW FOR THE LATEST NEWS. POLICE ARE COMBING THE COUNTRYSIDE NORTH OF HERE IN SEARCH OF A...

THE NEWS ANNOUNCER'S RASPY VOICE INTERRUPTED MY REVERIE. I REACHED FOR THE KNOB TO TURN IT OFF...



...IN SEARCH OF A YOUNG WOMAN WHO ESCAPED FROM THE STATE HOSPITAL FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE YESTERDAY. CITIZENS ARE WARNED TO STAY INDOORS. THIS WOMAN IS DANGEROUS.

CATHY STIRRED. I TURNED DOWN THE VOLUME

SHE IS FIVE FOOT FOUR INCHES TALL, 22 YEARS OLD, WITH NATURAL BLONDE HAIR. LAST SEEN BY A HUNTER IN THE WOODED SECTION EAST OF THE STATE HIGHWAY, DRESSED IN THE INSTITUTION'S REGULAR BLUE UNIFORM. HOWEVER, SHE WILL PROBABLY ATTEMPT TO RID HERSELF OF THESE TELL-TALE CLOTHES

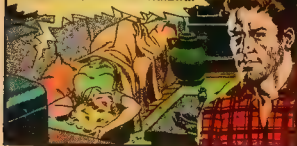
BLUE UNIFORM. GASP.. AND SHE'S IN THIS AREA.



I STARED AT THE BLUE BLOUSE AND SKIRT HANGING ON THE LINE NEAR THE FIREPLACE. THE ANNOUNCER CONTINUED...

ORIGINALLY COMMITTED TO THE STATE HOSPITAL FOR THE COLD-BLOODED STABBING OF THE MAN TO WHOM SHE WAS ENGAGED, THIS WOMAN IS DEEMED CAPABLE OF KILLING AGAIN! ALL PRECAUTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN...

GOOD LORD!



THE RADIO HAD AWAKENED HER. I SNAPPED IT OFF. I WONDERED HOW MUCH SHE'D HEARD...

YAWN... WAS THAT THE NEWS? DID THEY... HMMM... SAY ANYTHING ABOUT ME?

HUH? WHY... SHOULD THEY? NO ONE KNOWS YOU'RE LOST!



I STARTED FOR THE DOOR. CATHY FOLLOWED ME...

WHERE ARE WE GOING, BOB?

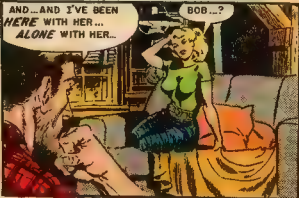
TO FIND YOUR CABIN, OF COURSE,



MY BLOOD FROZE IN MY VEINS. I LOOKED AT CATHY, SHE FIT THE DESCRIPTION PERFECTLY. AND SHE DID HAVE THAT BLUE OUTFIT. WAS CATHY THE MANIAC THEY WERE LOOKING FOR?

AND...AND I'VE BEEN HERE WITH HER... ALONE WITH HER...

BOB...?



SHE SAT UP. SHE LOOKED AT ME QUEERLY...

OF...COURSE. I FORGOT. HOW SILLY OF ME.

CATHY, YOUR CLOTHES ARE DRY. DON'T YOU WANT TO PUT THEM ON?



UH-UH! I LIKE THESE.

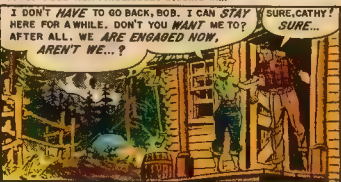
C'MON! IT'S GETTING LIGHT OUT.



WE WERE OUTSIDE THE DOOR NOW. CATHY CAUGHT MY ARM. I COULD FEEL HER FINGERNAILS DIGGING IN...

I DON'T HAVE TO GO BACK, BOB. I CAN STAY HERE FOR AWHILE. DON'T YOU WANT ME TO? AFTER ALL, WE ARE ENGAGED NOW, AREN'T WE...?

SURE, CATHY! SURE...



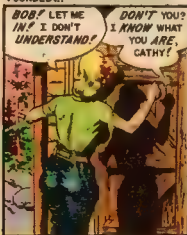
IT ALL ADDED UP. THE UNIFORM SHE DIDN'T WANT TO PUT BACK ON... HER DESCRIPTION... HER PHONY STORY OF HER FATHER'S CABIN... HER SLIP ABOUT THE NEWS BROADCAST... AND NOW, NOT WANTING TO LEAVE... AND US BEING ENGAGED...

CATHY WAS THE ESCAPED MANIAC THE POLICE WERE LOOKING FOR! AND...SHE WAS CAPABLE OF KILLING AGAIN! I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO ...



BOB! WAIT...

I SLAMMED THE DOOR AND LOCKED IT. CATHY STOOD OUTSIDE, DUMB-FOUNDED...



BOB! LET ME IN! I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

DON'T YOU? I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, CATHY!

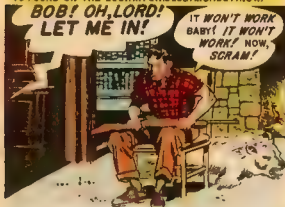
SHE STARTED TO CRY...

THEN...LAST NIGHT... SOB...IT DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU.

NOT A THING, HONEY! BEAT IT, HUH?



I SAT DOWN IN A CHAIR FACING THE DOOR WITH MY 30-30 ACROSS MY LAP. SUDDENLY CATHY BEGAN TO POUND ON THE DOOR...FURIOUSLY...SHOUTING ...



BOB! OH,LORD! LET ME IN!

IT WON'T WORK BABY! IT WON'T WORK! NOW, SCRAM!

THEN...SILENCE. OUTSIDE, I COULD HEAR HER MOVING AROUND. I WASN'T FALLING FOR ANYTHING. I WAITED. AFTER A WHILE, A SICKLY FINGER OF RED REACHED IN UNDER THE DOOR AND POOLED OUT OVER THE FLOOR...



GOOD LORD! BLOOD!

AND THEN CATHY SCREAMED. IT WAS AN EAR-SPLITTING SHRIEK THAT MADE ME SHIVER...



SHE CERTAINLY IS OFF HER ROCKER...

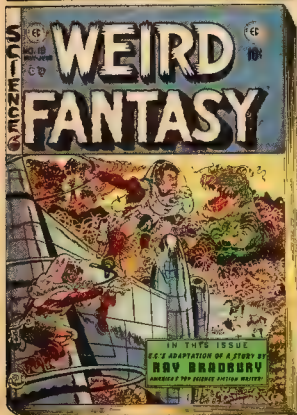
I LEAPED TO THE DOOR AND FLUNG IT OPEN. I STARED DOWN AT CATHY'S NUDE WHITE BODY WITH THE KNIFE STICKING OUT OF HER NECK AND THE COARSE BLUE UNIFORM FLUNG CARELESSLY OVER HER WITH THE STENCILED LETTERS! 'STATE HOSPITAL FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE'...



CATHY...MY GOD

AT THE EDGE OF THE CLEARING, A FIGURE WITH BLONDE HAIR, DRESSED IN MY BLUE JEANS AND T-SHIRT, WAS JUST DISAPPEARING INTO THE THICK WOODS. THE END

**WE AT E.C. ARE PROUDEST
OF OUR SCIENCE - FICTION
MAGAZINES! LOOK FOR...**

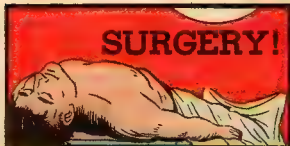


**LOOK FOR
THESE SEALS
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**THEY ARE YOUR ASSURANCE OF TOP
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Bat Parker sniffed deeply at the ether-soaked sponge, and felt the shabby room melting in front of him. His eyes blinked open and he managed to focus on the doctor for a second. Everything was going to be okay; the sawbones was all set to go to work with his scalpel, and Danny was right behind him with a gun jammed in the doc's back. Danny was a good kid . . . he'd make sure this unlicensed quack did what he had been told. And the liquor the old doctor had sopped up wouldn't do any harm, either . . . Steadied his nerves . . . strengthened the hand that was going to amputate Bat's gangrenous leg!

It had been only two hours ago that Bat — half-delirious when they carried him into the little rural hospital — heard the hick Police Surgeon mutter: "The whole leg's become one big festering wound! Gangrene's set in around those slugs already . . . if we don't amputate at the hip, the prisoner's a *goner* before nightfall! Only way we can save his worthless life is to cut off his right leg!"

The Constables, who had captured Bat after a furious gun-fight, went into a nervous discussion of what to do with the biggest catch of their lives; Bat, thrashing from side to side with delirium, had become aware suddenly of a shadow flitting surreptitiously into the hospital room. Even through the wave of pain which engulfed him in spasms, Bat realized that Danny — who had somehow eluded the cops during the ambush in which Bat had been so seriously wounded — had succeeded in sneaking back to help his boss. As Bat

propped himself on one elbow, he heard Danny's husky voice creating a stir in the hospital room. "Just stay where you are, coppers!" Danny was saying, his gun leveled ominously. "One twitch and I empty this roscoe into the nearest belly!"

Bat must have fainted then, for he remembered nothing until the agony of jouncing along a dirt road awakened him. Danny was at the wheel, peering intently at the rutted road. "W-Where . . . am . . . I . . . ?" Bat whispered, a shudder of pain pulsing through his swollen right leg. "T-The hick hospital . . . ?"

"Miles behind us," Danny said. "We're on our way to that old sawbones who usta work for the mob. That amputation I heard 'em talking about . . . Doc Spender, with some hooch under his belt, can do it in his place!"

Bat had passed out again, and when he came to he was stretched out on a table in the old doc's living room. Even through the ether that was making him drowsy, he knew that Danny had gotten the doc drunk enough to perform the amputation. In a few more minutes Bat would have no right leg . . . but it was better than rotting of gangrene . . .

They were in the car again, but this time Danny was alone in the front, with Bat bundled up on the rear seat.

"Went off fine," Danny said, intent on the road yawning in front of them. "Funny how Spender can perform surgery only when he's plastered! That leg came off near as you'd want it!"

"A-All over, eh?" Bat whispered. "I guess it coulda been worse. That leg *had* to go before it killed me. And I still have *one* pin left . . ."

Almost without realizing it, Bat reached out to pat his left leg reassuringly.

"G-Good Lord!" he screeched aloud. "T-That drunken idiot . . . h-he amputated m-my **LEFT LEG!**"



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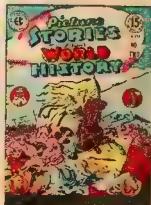


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SHOCK TALK

Dear Editors,

I would like to shake the hand of Ray Bradbury for his masterpiece, "The Small Assassin" (S.S. No. 7). It was great. Superbly written. The best E.C. story I've ever read."

J. S. Di Cicco
Brooklyn, N. Y.

... I've just finished reading the latest E.C.-Bradbury adaptation, and all I can say is it's TOPS. I certainly am glad E.C. has the honor of adapting Bradbury's stories instead of one of the companies that put out those crummy imitations of your magazines. They would have wrecked his stuff!

Ernie Crites
Chicago, Ill.

... As for Ray Bradbury, I wish you'd keep his stories coming forever.

Robert Ott
Port Jervis, N. Y.

... I hope you will have many more of Mr. Bradbury's stories in your magazines.

William Emmith
Beverly, Mass.

... I was certainly pleased to find that you have put Ray Bradbury's stories in your E.C. magazines. I don't think you could have chosen a better author. Probably his best, and least known, horror story, is "The October Game." Could you possibly adapt it in the near future?

Donn Albright
Muncie, Ind.

... My God, what's Ray Bradbury got against children? He must have been a mean child. He writes as if children are the downfall of the world. First, it was "Let's Play Poison," in Vault of Horror No. 29, and then it was "The Small Assassin," in Shock Suspense Stories No. 7...

Dick Arthur
(no address given)

Well, Donn, by now you've seen our adaptation of "The October Game," and let us assure you that we not only agree it's the best horror story Bradbury ever wrote ... we think it's the best horror story we've ever read ... bar none! As for you, Dick, we trust "The October Game" has made you happy!!!!—editors

Reader Dick Arthur's letter goes on to ask:

... What is the cover of Shock Suspense Stories No. 7 supposed to mean? A man burning up, while another man is outside in a storm?

And there were many others, such as:

... I was pleased as punch to see a Feldstein cover on Shock Suspense Stories again. Al hasn't done one

since Shock Suspense Stories No. 1, has he? It was, as usual for Feldstein, a masterpiece. But I don't understand what was going on!

Herbie Volchok
N. Y. C.

... and the idea for the cover was terrific, having a close-up of a guy being hit by lightning with a far-shot of his reflection in a window. But what story did it come from?

Irene Evans
Lynchburg, Va.

Get it, Herbie? As for the subject matter coming from a story in the book, Irene, we usually attempt to do this. However, as you may recall, for Shock No. 1, we tried to give you what we considered the most "shocking" cover we could think of ... that of someone being executed in an electric chair! Shock No. 7 being our first anniversary issue, we attempted once again, to conceive of an even more "shocking" cover ... and came up with the illustration in question, someone being struck by lightning! — ed.

Dear Editors,

I wish to take this opportunity to say that your request (i.e. the appeal we made for your support during these trying times of overcrowding and poor sales! — ed.) in S.S. No. 7 was totally unnecessary. After reading just one of your magazines, I became a regular purchaser of every one you put out. I don't see how any one could fail to buy all of your magazines after reading but one. I dare say that I, along with many, many other of your readers, will do my best to continue giving you my loyal support.

Count Bonés
(no address given)

... All I can say is E.C. will be publishing magazines in the 21st century. People traveling between the planets will sit back and enjoy E.C.'s. People'll be going back in time-machines to get back issues. In fact, by the year 2000, E.C.'s will be the only comics accepted by the then discerning public. No more war ... people will be reading E.C.'s for excitement. And as for YOU thanking US for buying your mags, BAH, HUMB, we should thank YOU for PUBLISHING them

Edwin Zureich
Sandusky, Ohio

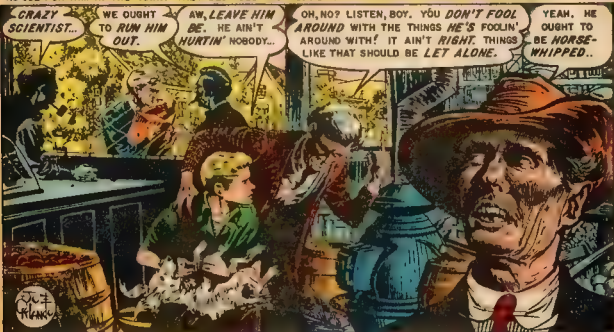
Choke! — ed.

Before closing, just a reminder that subscriptions to Shock or any other E.C. mag. will cost you 75c each, coin of the realm, for a full year's supply ... six issues ... manila envelopes! Address for your comments, suggestions, insults, subscription orders, or chicken innards is:

The Editors
Shock Suspense Stories
Room 706, Dept. 9
225 Lafayette St.
N. Y. C. 12, N. Y.

The MEDDLERS!

WHEN HE CAME DOWNTOWN ON THOSE RARE VISITS TO PICK UP PROVISIONS OR THE PACKAGES OF CHEMICALS AND EQUIPMENT THAT WAITED FOR HIM AT THE LOCAL POST OFFICE, IT WAS AS THOUGH THE PEOPLE ON THE STREETS HAD SUDDENLY BEEN STRICKEN DUMB. IT SEEMED LIKE INVISIBLE HANDS HAD BEEN CLAPPED OVER THEIR MOUTHS, SMOTHERING THEIR WORDS IN THEIR THROATS, CUTTING OFF THEIR CONVERSATIONS. HE WOULD WALK PAST THEIR STARES, THROUGH THEIR SILENT DISTRUST AND HATE, AND FINISH HIS BUSINESS QUICKLY AND LEAVE. THEY HAD NO USE FOR HIM IN THE TOWN. THEY DESPISED HIS MEDDLING IN THINGS THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND.



DOCTOR CONRAD RIVERS HAD COME TO THE QUIET TOWN OF MILLVILLE TWO YEARS BEFORE. HE'D ARRIVED IN A STATION WAGON FILLED WITH CHEMICALS AND ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT AND LABORATORY APPARATUS. AND HE'D STOOD ON THE DUSTY SIDEWALK AMID THE HOSTILE STARES, THE SILENT RESENTMENT AT A STRANGER, AND HE'D ASKED...

DOES ANYONE KNOW WHERE I CAN RENT A SMALL HOUSE? I'D LIKE TO CARRY ON MY WORK HERE IN MILLVILLE.

WHAT KIND OF WORK, STRANGER?

HE'D FELT THEIR ANIMOSITY TOWARD HIM ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. BUT HE'D SMILED, DETERMINED TO WIN THEIR FRIENDSHIP AND RESPECT...

SCIENTIFIC WORK, MY FRIEND. I AM A RESEARCH CHEMIST. THE SAND QUARRY NORTH OF TOWN CONTAINS COMPOUNDS I NEED IN MY EXPERIMENTS.

DON'T WANT NOBODY AROUND HERE WHO MIGHT BLOW UP THE PLACE, STRANGER.



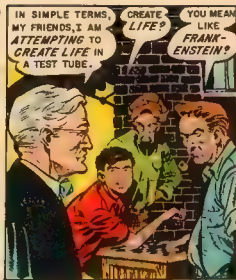
A Marble River scene



A SCIENCE-FICTION SUSPENSORY

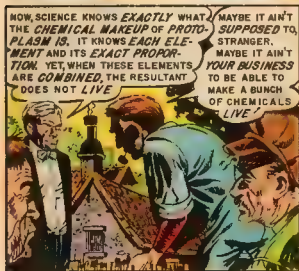
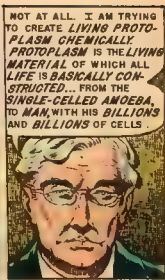


ORGANIC? WHAT'S THAT?

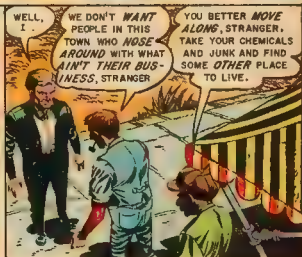


CREATE LIFE?

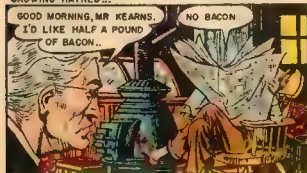
YOU MEAN LIKE FRANK-ENSTEIN?



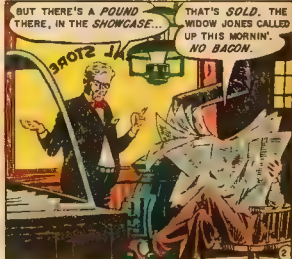
MAYBE IT AIN'T SUPPOSED TO, STRANGER. MAYBE IT AIN'T YOUR BUSINESS TO BE ABLE TO MAKE A BUNCH OF CHEMICALS LIVE!



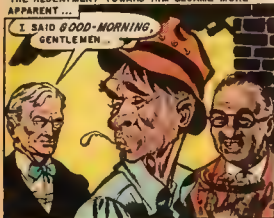
BUT DESPITE THE TOWNSFOLK'S DISAPPROVAL OF HIM, DOCTOR RIVERS HAD FOUND AN OLD HOUSE AND MOVED IN TO MILLVILLE. HE'D SHRUGGED OFF THEIR HOSTILITY, KEPT TO HIMSELF, AND PLUNGED INTO HIS WORK. AND EACH TIME HE'D LEFT THE QUIET TRANQUILITY OF HIS LABORATORY AND GONE DOWNTOWN, HE'D FELT THEIR GROWING HATRED...



NO BACON



AT FIRST IT WAS LITTLE THINGS THAT THE DOCTOR OVERLOOKED. BUT AS THE WEEKS AND MONTHS CRAWLED BY, THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE RESENTMENT TOWARD HIM BECAME MORE APPARENT...



I SAID GOOD-MORNING, GENTLEMEN...

BUT DOCTOR RIVERS IGNORED THEIR ABUSES AND STUBBORNLY CONTINUED ON WITH HIS WORK...



ONE DAY, A ROCK WAS PITCHED THROUGH HIS LABORATORY WINDOW... SMASHING A BEAKER OF SOLUTION HE'D LABORED SO LONG TO PRODUCE.

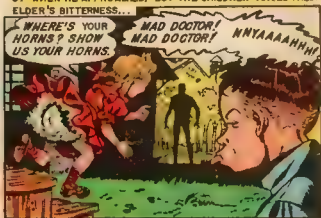


WHAT THE...

CRASH

CRACK

A CAMPAIGN OF SILENCE HAD BEGUN. RARELY A WORD WAS SPOKEN TO THE DOCTOR. THE PORCH-SITTERS AND OLD TIMERS THAT HUNG AROUND THE STORES IN TOWN CLAMMED UP WHEN HE APPROACHED. BUT THE CHILDREN VOICED THEIR ELDER'S BITTERNESS...



WHERE'S YOUR HORNS? SHOW US YOUR HORNS.

MAD DOCTOR! MAD DOCTOR!

NYYAAAAHHH!

HE'D LOOKED DOWN AT THE SPLINTERS OF GLASS AND THE SHIMMERING CHEMICALS, AND HE'D SHAKEN HIS HEAD...



FOUR MONTHS' WORK RUINED!

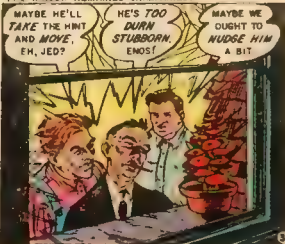
BUT THE DOCTOR HAD FELT NO MALICE TOWARD HIS PERSECUTERS. HE'D GONE INTO TOWN AND



I HAVE A WINDOW THAT NEEDS FIXING!

ALL BOOKED UP THIS WEEK. MAYBE NEXT WEEK...

THE WINDOW REMAINED UNREPAIRED.



MAYBE HE'LL TAKE THE HINT AND MOVE, EH, JED?

HE'S TOO DURN STUBBORN, ENOS!

MAYBE WE OUGHT TO NUDGE HIM A BIT

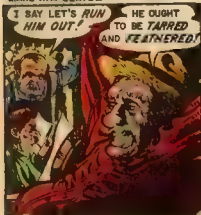
AND ALONG WITH THE ABUSES HE SUFFERED CAME REPEATED FAILURE AFTER FAILURE. THE EXPERIMENTAL SOLUTIONS THE DOCTOR PREPARED SHOWED NO SIGNS OF LIFE. BEAKER AFTER BEAKER OF DISCARDED FORMULAS LINED HIS

RECEPTS...



LOOKS LIKE THIS ONE'S WRONG, TOO! ANOTHER FAILURE...

AND ALONG WITH THE DOCTOR'S GROWING DESIRE FOR THE SUCCESS OF HIS EXPERIMENTS CAME THE TOWNSFOLKS' MOUNTING ANGER AND FRUSTRATION AT THEIR FAILURE TO MAKE HIM LEAVE...



I SAY LET'S RUN HIM OUT!

HE OUGHT TO BE TARRED AND FEATHERED!

...UNTIL AN ANGRY HOSTILE CROWD, SHOUTING AND CURSING AND FLINGING INVECTIVES, STORMED THE OLD HOUSE...



BUST THE DOOR DOWN! HE WON'T OPEN UP!

ONE... TWO... THREE...

BUT HE WOULD NOT BE DISCOURAGED. EACH FAILURE BROUGHT REDOUBLED EFFORT... EACH ABUSE, INCREASED DETERMINATION...

THAT SPARK OF LIFE... THAT INTANGIBLE SOMETHING THAT WILL SHOCK THESE ELEMENTS INTO COMBINING, AND LIVING, AND GROWING. WHAT IS IT? WHERE CAN I FIND IT...?



UNTIL, ONE NIGHT...



G'MON! LET'S TEACH HIM A LESSON!

LET'S SHOW HIM HE AIN'T WANTED! LET'S SHOW HIM GOOD!

LET'S GO...

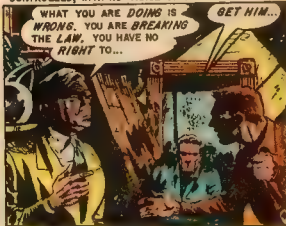
THEY MOVED THROUGH THE DARKENED STREETS... PICKING UP MORE AND MORE AS THEY MOVED ALONG...



WHERE Y'GOIN'?

GONNA RUN THE DOC OUT OF TOWN!

DOCTOR RIVERS STOOD IN HIS LABORATORY... DEFIANT... CALM. THEY CROWDED IN. HIS VOICE WAS CONTROLLED, WITH NO TRACE OF FEAR...



WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS WRONG. YOU ARE BREAKING THE LAW. YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO...

GET HIM...

THE HELPLESS DOCTOR WAS LIFTED BODILY BY STRONG HANDS AND CARRIED FROM THE LABORATORY. OTHER ANGRY FISTS SMASHED TEST TUBES AND BOTTLES AND APPARATUS...



SUDDENLY THE STRUGGLING DOCTOR STIFFENED AND SCREAMED IN PAIN, CLUTCHING HIS CHEST...



INSIDE THE OLD HOUSE, THERE WAS SILENCE. THE LABORATORY LAY IN RUINS...



THE BEAKERS THAT LINED THE SHELVES WERE DUMPED AND SMASHED INTO THE SINK...



THEY LAID HIM ON THE DEW-MOISTENED GRASS AND STOOD AROUND HIM, GASPING AND CATCHING THEIR BREATH. AND THEY WATCHED HIS EYES GLAZE AND LOSE THEIR EXPRESSION UNTIL THEY STARED BLINDLY AT THE STARS...



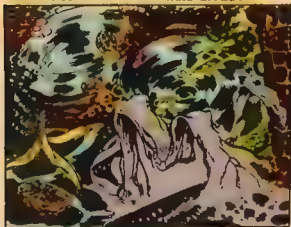
AND IN THE SINK, THE COUNTLESS FAILURES, THE UNSUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS, A LIFE'S WORK, SHIMMERED AND TWISTED AND RAN SADLY DOWN THE DRAIN...



...DOWN INTO DARKNESS AND DAMPNESS, THROUGH FOUL-SMELLING PIPES AND RUSTED CONDUITS, INTO THE SEWERAGE SYSTEM OF THE TOWN...



AND THERE, IN THE DARKNESS AND THE FILTH, AMID THE WASTES OF MEN AND THE SWILL AND SLOUGH OF THE TOWN, THE SOLUTIONS SWIRLED AND EDDIED AND COMBINED... AND LIVED.



AND WHEN THE LEAVINGS AND THE WASTAGE OF THE PEOPLE ABOVE NO LONGER SATIATED THE GROWING SUCKING THING, IT SOUGHT OUT THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES...



JED HAD BEEN TAKING A SHOWER. HE NEVER NOTICED THE SICKLY GLOB OOZE UP FROM THE DRAIN...



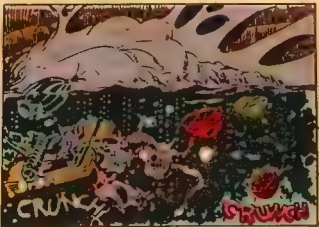
MARTHA STARED IN HORROR AS JED DRAGGED HIMSELF FROM THE BATHROOM. ONLY STUMPS REMAINED WHERE HAD ONCE BEEN HEALTHY LEGS.



ENOS SCOOPED HANDFULS OF WATER FROM THE BASIN AND DASHED THEM ON HIS FACE, CHASING THE SLEEP FROM HIS EYES. HE NEVER NOTICED THE RUBBER STOPPER LIFT AND THE OOZE FILL THE BASIN...



OUT OF THE MUCK AND POLLUTION, IT DREW ITS LIFE. IT FED UPON THE EXCREMENTS AND BILGE AND DREGS OF THE COMMUNITY ABOVE. AND IT GREW. IT GREW LARGER. THE REFUSE NURTURED IT...



WHEN HE LOOKED AT HIS HANDS, THEY WERE STRIPPED OF THEIR FLESH. WHEN HE LOOKED AT HIS FACE, HE SAW THE PERSONIFICATION OF DEATH...



AND THESE WERE ONLY THE BEGINNING...

END

CARRION DEATH!

MY LIPS ARE PARCHED AND SWOLLEN AND CRACKED, MY TONGUE IS DRY AND SEARCHES MY MOUTH FOR MOISTURE, BUT FINDS NONE, I LIE ON THE BURNING HOT SAND, STARING UP AT THE CLOUDLESS SKY. THE GLARING SUN BAKES DOWN, AND MY EYES SMART BUT THEY DO NOT TEAR, FOR I HAVE HAD NO WATER FOR FOUR DAYS. I LIE ON THE STEAMING DESERT BADLANDS AND I WATCH THE BUZZARDS CIRCLING LAZILY, SCREAMING AND SOARING, SWOOPING HUNGRILY, AND I WAIT...

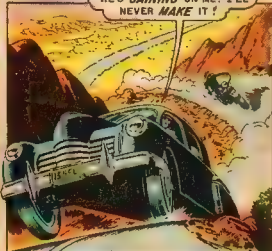
C'MON, YOU LOUSY VULTURES! C'MON DOWN HERE AND FEAST! C'MON DOWN HERE AND SET ME FREE!



REED
CRANDALL

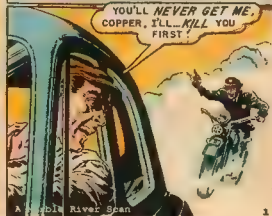
I TRY TO REMEMBER HOW IT ALL BEGAN... HOW I CAME TO BE LYING HERE, IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, WAITING FOR THE CARRION BIRDS TO DROP DOWN AND SINK THEIR RAZOR SHARP TALONS INTO FLESH AND TEAR AND RIP AND FREE ME FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH. I SEE IT NOW... THE RIBBON OF CONCRETE STRETCHING ACROSS THE DESERT, SWEEPING BENEATH MY SPEEDING CARWHEELS...

HE'S GAINING ON ME! I'LL NEVER MAKE IT!



BESIDE ME, ON THE CAR SEAT, THIRTY THOUSAND DOLLARS RESTED IN A BLACK SATCHEL. THIRTY THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR WHICH I'D HELD UP A BANK AND MURDERED A GUARD. AHEAD, EASY LIVING AND WOMEN AND FANCY CLOTHES WAITED, SMILING, BECKONING. BUT RIGHT BEHIND ME, CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN US, HIS SIREN WAILING, CAME THE STATE TROOPER...

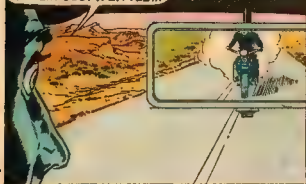
YOU'LL NEVER GET ME, COPPER. I'LL KILL YOU FIRST!



A Public River Span

I PRESSED THE ACCELERATOR TO THE FLOOR BOARDS, URGING MY CAR AHEAD. I COULD SEE THE TROOPER IN THE REAR MIRROR, HURLING AFTER ME, TAKING CAREFUL AIM...

JUST A LITTLE CLOSER, COPPER! JUST A LITTLE...



BUT THE SOUND OF METAL CRASHING AGAINST METAL AND THE DULL THUD OF FLESH AND BONE SPLASHING AGAINST STEEL NEVER CAME. MY CAR SWERVED, SKIDDING ONTO THE GRAVEL SHOULDER OF THE ROAD, AND EVERYTHING STARTED WHIRLING CRAZILY AS IT SPUN OVER...



THAT WAS ALL. I SLIPPED INTO A WORLD OF DARKNESS AND HEAT, AND WHEN I OPENED MY EYES, THE CAR WAS A MASS OF FLAMES AND I WAS OUTSIDE, LYING BESIDE THE MOTORCYCLE. THE TROOPER WAS SPEAKING TO SOMEONE...

YEAH. I GOT HIM. HE'S OUT COLD. WRAPPED UP HIS CAR BUT I PULLED HIM OUT BEFORE IT CAUGHT FIRE.



HE WAS KNEELING BESIDE ME, MIKE IN HAND. I FELT A COLD RING OF STEEL AROUND MY WRIST. I WAS HANDCUFFED TO THE TROOPER, AND HE WAS REPORTING IN ON HIS TWO-WAY RADIO...

COME ON OUT AND GET US. I'LL WAIT HERE FOR YOU, THAT'S RIGHT. SIXTEEN MILES SOUTH ON ROUTE 209



AND THEN I SLAMMED MY FOOT ON THE BRAKES. THE TIRES SQUEELED ALONG THE CONCRETE, MARKING A DOUBLE BLACK LINE OF BURNED RUBBER. I WAITED FOR THE IMPACT OF THE TROOPER AND HIS MOTORCYCLE MASHING INTO THE REAR OF MY CAR...

SUCKER...



I FELT MYSELF LEAVE THE SEAT, THROWN FORWARD, THE STEERING WHEEL CRUSHING AGAINST MY CHEST. THEN I WAS FLYING UPWARD, MY HEAD STRIKING THE CAR ROOF, AS THE BLACKNESS CLOSED IN, I COULD HEAR THE SHATTERING OF GLASS AND THE ROAR OF THE TROOPER'S BIKE AS IT SHOT PAST...



I WAS CAUGHT. TERROR CLAWED AT MY RACING HEART. THE TROOPER WASN'T LOOKING AT ME. HE STILL THOUGHT I WAS OUT COLD, IT WAS MY ONLY CHANCE...

I RECOGNIZED HIS CAR BY THE DESCRIPTION. THE MONEY'S BEEN BURNED. YEAH. OKAY... SEE YOU IN A FEW MINUTES. OH, BY THE WAY. BRING THE MASTER CUFF-KEY! I HAVEN'T GOT MINE...



I YANKED HARD AND HE LOST HIS BALANCE. HE TOPPLED OVER ME AND MY FREE HAND FOUND HIS NECK. HIS CRY OF SURPRISE GURGLD IN HIS THROAT AS MY FINGERS CLOSED AROUND IT...

HEY! G-G-G-H-H-GH-GH-GH...



I ROLLED OVER ON TOP OF HIM, STRADDLING HIM. HIS FREE HAND WENT FOR HIS GUN AND I KICKED. IT CLATTERED ACROSS THE CONCRETE ONTO THE GRAVEL SHOULDER. HIS EYES BULGED AND HIS FACE TURNED RED, THEN PURPLE, AND I HELD ON...



AND THEN HIS BODY WENT LIMP AND I KNEW I'D STRANGLD HIM. I STARTED GOING THROUGH HIS POCKETS, LOOKING FOR THE KEY TO THE HANDCUFFS.

NO KEY! I GUESS I GOT A LITTLE HYSTERICAL. I RIPPED AT HIS CLOTHES, CURSING. I DRAGGED HIM TO THE MOTORCYCLE AND STARTED TO RIFLE THROUGH THE SIDE-PACKS WHEN I REMEMBERED WHAT HE'D SAID...

I WAS HANDCUFFED TO A CORPSE. AND IN A FEW MOMENTS, MORE COPS WOULD BE THERE. I LOOKED AROUND WILDLY. FAR DOWN THE LONG AND STRAIGHT ROAD, A SMALL SPECK APPEARED ON THE HORIZON.

WHERE IS IT, BLAST YOU?
WHERE'S THE KEY?



OH, BY THE WAY. BRING THE MASTER CUFF-KEY! I HAVEN'T GOT MINE...

GOOD LORD!



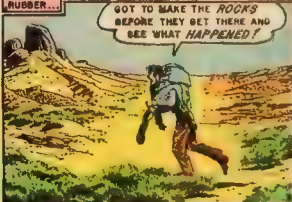
I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE...



I PICKED UP THE DEAD TROOPER AND THREW HIM ACROSS MY SHOULDERS. TO TRY TO USE THE MOTORCYCLE WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION. MY ONE CHANCE LAY IN MAKING FOR THE BAD LANDS. I STARTED TO RUN...

I KEPT RUNNING UNTIL MY HEART FELT LIKE SOMEONE WAS TRYING TO POUND THEIR WAY OUT OF MY CHEST... MY THROAT FELT LIKE A STEEL BAND WAS WRAPPED AROUND IT... AND MY LEGS FELT LIKE RUBBER...

GOT TO MAKE THE ROCKS BEFORE THEY GET THERE AND SEE WHAT HAPPENED!



I KEPT GOING. THE BODY I CARRIED FELT AS THOUGH IT WEIGHED FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS. MY LEGS WERE NUMB. MY CLOTHES WERE SOAKED IN PERSPIRATION. FINALLY I REACHED THE RUGGED ROCKY SECTION I'D HEADED FOR.

GASP... GASP... GASP... I... GOT A KNIFE IN MY POCKET. IT'S THE ONLY WAY I GOT TO... GET... GASP... FREE OF HIM...



AND THEN, FAR BACK ACROSS THE BURNING SAND, BACK AT THE ROAD, I COULD HEAR THE CAR SQUEALING TO A STOP...

THEY'LL GET ME FOR SURE. I HAVEN'T GOT ENOUGH OF A LEAD!
I... I...



I COULD SEE THEM GETTING OUT OF THEIR CAR, LOOKING AROUND AT THE SMOLDERING WRECK, THE PARKED BIKE...

THEY'RE NOT STATE TROOPERS. ONE OF THEM'S A WOMAN...



I LAY BEHIND A ROCK BESIDE THE TROOPER'S BODY, SUCKING IN THE HOT DESERT AIR AND SEARCHING MY POCKETS FOR MY KNIFE. BUT MY POCKETS WERE...

EMPTY! THE DIRTY @##?XX!! HE MUST HAVE GLEANED ME OUT WHILE I WAS UNCONSCIOUS!



IT WAS THE BREAK I NEEDED. I'D CAUGHT MY BREATH, SO I HOISTED THE BODY TO MY SHOULDERS AGAIN AND STARTED OFF...



DARKNESS COMES FAST IN THE BADLANDS. THE SHADOWS FROM THE MOUNTAINS OFF TO THE WEST DROP DOWN ON YOU LIKE A GREY BLANKET, AND THE STARS ARE SUDDENLY TWINKLING OVERHEAD. I DIDN'T SLEEP THAT FIRST NIGHT. I KEPT GOING, CARRYING THAT CORPSE, STUMBLING IN THE BLACKNESS, GETTING UP, AND MOVING ON...

THEY'LL NEVER TRACK ME NOW. THIS IS REAL ROCKY COUNTRY. AND THEY CAN'T USE BLOODHOUNDS THEY HAVE *NOTHIN'* TO GIVE THE HOUNDS TO SMELL. MY CAR BURNED...



FINALLY, TOWARDS MORNING, I COLLAPSED FROM EXHAUSTION. I LAY BESIDE THE CORPSE, LICKING MY LIPS AND TASTING THE SALTY SWEAT. AND SUDDENLY I WANTED A DRINK. I WANTED A DRINK IN THE WORST WAY AND I KNEW IF I DIDN'T DO SOMETHING FAST, I'D DIE OF THIRST OUT THERE...

I'VE GOT TO GET FREE OF THIS BLASTED BODY SOMEHOW...

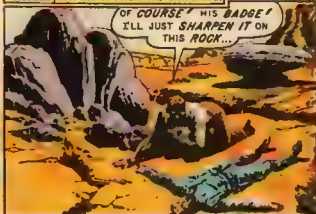


THE SUN CAME UP IN ALL ITS BLAZING FURY AND BAKED DOWN ON THE ROCKS AND THE SAND. I PULLED AND TUGGED, TRYING TO WRENCH THE CUFFS FROM THE CORPSE, NOW GROWING RIGID WITH RIGOR MORTIS...



IT'S NO USE! I'VE GOT TO CUT MYSELF AWAY...

AND THEN HIS GLEAMING BADGE CAUGHT THE SUN'S REFLECTION AND SENT IT STREAMING INTO MY EYES. I GIGGLED, RIPPING IT FROM HIS UNIFORM...



OF COURSE! HIS BADGE! I'LL JUST SHARPEN IT ON THIS ROCK...

ONCE, WHEN I WAS A KID, I WENT DOWN TO THE STOCKYARDS... TO A SLAUGHTER HOUSE... AND WATCHED THEM SLAUGHTER A LAMB AND SKIN IT. IT MADE ME SICK, AS THE SHARPENED BADGE SLIT THE WHITE FLESH, REVEALING THE RED, SLIMY MUSCLES AND TENDONS. I GOT SICK AGAIN, JUST LIKE THAT TIME SO LONG AGO

THE BADGE DROPPED FROM MY HAND, CLATTERED TO THE ROCKY GROUND, AND SKIDDED DOWN INTO A CREVICE. WHEN I WAS FINISHED EMPTYING MY GUTS OF THE LAST DROP OF LIQUID LEFT IN THEM, I REALIZED WHAT HAD HAPPENED...

MY ONE CHANCE... GONE... I CAN'T REACH IT...



CHOKED



AND THEN THEY WERE OVERHEAD... THE BUZZARDS. THEY SOARED AND CIRCLED, SCARCELY MOVING THEIR WINGS. THEIR HUNGRY SCREAMS ECHOED FROM ROCK TO ROCK, SUMMONING MORE



GOOD LORD!

I STARTED TO RUN... DRAGGING THE BODY... FALLING... GETTING UP. BUT THEY STAYED ABOVE ME, CIRCLING, CIRCLING, THEIR SCREECHES LAUGHING AT ME...



OH, LORD. WHAT'LL I DO? WHAT'LL I DO?

I KEPT GOING UNTIL I COULDN'T GO ON ANY FURTHER. MY WRISTS BLEED WHERE THE HANDCUFFS HAD TORN THE FLESH. MY LIPS WERE DRY. EVERYTHING STARTED SPINNING. I SLIPPED TO THE GROUND. AND AS THE BLACKNESS CLOSED IN, THE SCREAMS SEEMED TO COME OUT OF THE HOT AIR DOWN TOWARD ME...



WHEN I CAME TO, I WAS SHIVERING FROM THE COLD. IT WAS NIGHT AGAIN! BESIDE ME, THE CORPSE LAY RIGID, AND BLACK SHADOWS CROUCHED UPON IT. I SCREAMED...

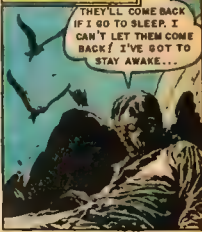


THE BUZZARDS TOOK UP THE CHORUS, THEIR WINGS BEATING UP INTO THE BLACKNESS. THEY CIRCLED ABOVE ME, FRIGHTENED OFF BY MY CRY...



THEY...CHOKED. THEY WERE FEEDING ON HIM...

I RETCHED BUT THERE WAS NOTHING IN ME TO HEAVE. I LAY BACK, SHIVERING AND PERSPIRING, LISTENING TO THE SCREAMS AND THE FLAPPING OF HUGE WINGS...



THEY'LL COME BACK IF I GO TO SLEEP. I CAN'T LET THEM COME BACK! I'VE GOT TO STAY AWAKE...

THE NIGHT CRAWLED BY AND DAWN CAME, AND ONCE MORE THE SUN LEAPED INTO THE CLOUDLESS SKY AND BURNED DOWN UPON ME, AND THE STENCH OF THE PARTIALLY EATEN BODY I WAS HANDCUFFED TO SEARED MY DUST-FILLED DRY NOSTRILS...



IF I COULD FIND A CABIN... A PROSPECTOR'S OR A MINER'S... WITH A KNIFE...

I LIFTED THE PARTIALLY EATEN BODY AND STAGGERED ON...SEARCHING... LISTENING. BUT THE ONLY SOUNDS I HEARD WERE THE CRIES OF THE CARRION BIRDS OVERHEAD. BY NIGHTFALL, MY LIPS WERE CRACKED AND MY TONGUE WAS SWOLLEN AND I PERSPIRED NO LONGER...



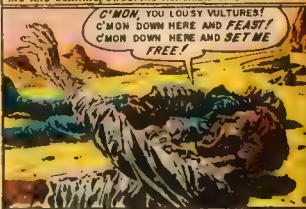
I'LL DIE IF I DON'T GET FREE OF HIM! I'LL DIE...

I WAS WEAK AND DIZZY AND I HAD TO FIGHT TO KEEP AWAKE...TO KEEP THOSE HORRIBLE CREATURES AWAY. AND THEN I THOUGHT OF MY OWN CHANCE...MY ONE DESPERATE CHANCE TO SAVE MYSELF...



THE BUZZARDS! THEY COULD SAVE ME. THEY DON'T EAT LIVE FLESH...ONLY DEAD. THEY COULD FREE ME...

AND AS DAWN OF THE FOURTH DAY BROKE, I LAY ON THE HOT BURNING SAND STARING UP AT THE CLOUDLESS SKY WATCHING THE BUZZARDS CIRCLING LAZILY, SCREAMING AND SOARING, SWOOPING HUNGRILY. AND I WAITED...



C'MON, YOU LOUSY VULTURES! C'MON DOWN HERE AND FEAST! C'MON DOWN HERE AND SET ME FREE!

THE GLARING SUN BAKES DOWN, AND MY EYES SMART BUT THEY DO NOT TEAR, FOR I HAVE HAD NO WATER FOR FOUR DAYS. I WAIT. I WAIT, AND I WATCH. AND THEN, ONE OF THEM DROPS TOWARD ME...



I DO NOT MOVE. I DO NOT DARE. I DO NOT WANT TO SCARE THEM OFF AGAIN. I CLOSE MY EYES, LISTENING TO THE BEATING OF WINGS AS THE OTHERS COME DOWN...



I LISTEN TO THEM TEARING AND SQUEALING AND FIGHTING AMONG THEMSELVES AS THEY GORGE UPON THE DEAD FLESH...

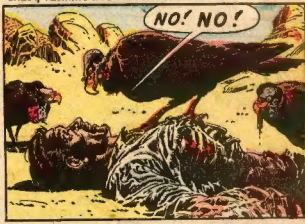


AND I WAIT. I WAIT AND LISTEN TO THE TEARING AND PULLING AND SCREECHING AND SOFT MUNCHING. AND THEN I LOOK...

OH, MY LORD!



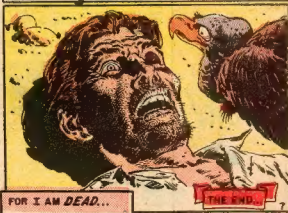
THE CORPSE BESIDE ME IS PRACTICALLY STRIPPED CLEAN. BUT I FEEL NO NAUSEA. I FEEL NO REVULSION. NOT EVEN WHEN I SEE THE HULKING SHADOW ON MY OWN CHEST, TEARING AND RIPPING AND SQUEALING...



AND I FEEL NO PAIN AS THE VICE-LIKE JAWS OF THE RAW-NECKED VULTURES CLOSE UPON MY FLESH AND PEEL IT FROM MY BONES. I CANNOT MOVE... I CANNOT STOP THEM.



I CAN ONLY WATCH IN SILENT HORROR AS THEY FEED UPON ME. I CAN WATCH ONLY UNTIL ONE OF THEM PLUCKS MY EYEBALLS FROM MY SKULL...



FOR I AM DEAD...

THE END

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